

A stylized illustration in a stained-glass or woodcut style. The background features a sunburst pattern with rays in shades of brown, red, and gold. Below the sun, there are wavy lines in shades of blue and grey, representing water or a landscape. In the foreground, a person is shown in profile, facing right, with their hands raised in a gesture of prayer or praise. The person is rendered in dark brown and purple tones. The overall composition is framed by a dark border.

ELCA

Recommended Practices
for Lifelong Faith Formation

Faith
Formation

Dear Faith Practitioner,

Perhaps you find yourself entering into a new faith community, or you've been a part of one your whole life. Wherever you find yourself, the Good News is that Jesus is there with you. And Jesus invites us to practice faith on a daily basis. We may never get it *all* right, but with Jesus by our side, we trust we won't get it all wrong, either. Our hope is that within this short booklet, you find practical resources for your ongoing faith journey whether you are an individual, a household, a congregation, or another faith-filled community. Please keep in mind these are RECOMMENDED PRACTICES so when using any suggestions adapt them freely to your situation and setting.

Tips for use: *This handbook gives concrete, easily accessible touchpoints for faith formation, but these are just a few examples. We encourage use of elca.org and ministrylinks.online for more comprehensive resources.

*The age brackets in the following material are meant for quick accessibility and not to limit the scope of where you might be in faith. Several of these practices you might already be doing, while the less familiar might stretch you--let the Spirit guide where to start.

*This resource also seeks to be gender inclusive with alternating uses of her/his/their so that we might all envision ourselves as faith formation participants.

Blessings to you as you live out your faith, claim your Christian identity, and share God's love in the world in creative and unique ways.²

Together in ministry,



The Reverend Janelle Rozek Hooper

Program Director for Ministry with Children on behalf of the Domestic Mission Unit



Background

For years Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations have taught Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism* as central to the rite of Confirmation, a traditional benchmark in faith formation. The fourfold **ELCA Recommended Practices for Lifelong Faith Formation** broaden our tradition beyond just goals for confirmation youth but for people of all ages in diverse ministry settings, including, but not limited to, congregations, campus ministries, Christian schools, outdoor ministries, and households/the domestic church.^{3 4}

Congregations, for the most part, teach us Christians beliefs and provide safe spaces to wrestle with them through worship services, education, acts of justice, and a variety of programming. As effective as church programming can be, it cannot replace home lives filled with faith conversations, rituals, and service to others.^{5 6} Whether we are “young” or not, daily connections to faith with the support of others exponentially strengthen us in our faith journeys.

These journeys are ongoing and build upon previous knowledge and experiences. So how can anyone else know where you are on the journey, and what you need to move forward? Conversations and questions are key.

ELCA Recommended Practices for Lifelong Faith Formation provides quick reference points for guidance when in-depth questions arise (e.g., “Should I ask my fourth grader to give to the offering?”). Answers may vary, so this handbook encourages faith-filled questioning and wondering while providing basic guidance for lifelong faith formation in four specific areas: spiritual practices, respectful relationships, guided learning, and faith-filled service.



Biblical Grounding:

In the book of Acts, Lydia engaged in a **spiritual practice** by regularly joining Paul’s Christian community at the river to pray. There by the water, Paul and Silas engaged with Lydia, a worshipper of God, in a mutually **respectful relationship**. With trust established, Lydia experienced the Good News of Jesus through Paul’s **guided learning**. She then decided that she and her household should be baptized in that very river. Immediately Lydia invited Paul and Silas back to her house for hospitality in **faith-filled service** to God’s ministry.⁷

ELCA Vision

The ELCA⁸ has a vision for lifelong faith formation⁹ that is grounded in biblical stories such as Lydia's, where four central faith formation components stand out.¹⁰

Spiritual Practices



Respectful Relationships



Guided Learning



Faith-filled Service



Spiritual Practices are activities undertaken with intentional awareness of the presence of the Holy. Individuals and communities use these practices to revere and rest in the mystery of the Divine. Used repeatedly, they foster a habit of attention to oneself, God, and neighbor.

Respectful Relationships can be formed with family, friends, church staff, lay mentors, spiritual directors, and coaches. Healthy relationships always include trust, listening, challenge, compassion, and commitment to one another. Each person's location on her faith journey (e.g., wilderness or mountaintop) guides the interactions.

Guided Learning happens when we visit and revisit Biblical stories, or hear and share each other's faith stories, with a sense of wonder and discovery. Guided learning is not simply about garnering knowledge, but also about wrestling with how to live faithfully each day.

Faith-filled Service recognizes the need to act on behalf of one's beliefs. Whether or not the work is done outwardly in Jesus's name, the faith underlying the service makes it a demonstration of love for God and neighbor.

Children on the Way/Infants¹¹



Spiritual Practices:

- Pray for the entirety of the child's life in faith, even from before birth.
- Have the child baptized.
- Play Christian children's music.



Respectful Relationships:

- Build trust through "attuned attention, engagement, smiling, holding, rocking, and singing."¹⁰
- Grandparents: pray, participate in the child's life, tell them stories, and be physically affectionate.
- Godparents: pray and attend church with the child, light baptismal candle yearly together.



Guided Learning:

- Read sacred stories and sing beloved hymns to the child while cuddling, building trust, familiarity with stories, and love for reading and music.
- Consider ELCA preschools.
- Join a parent group and/or Bible study group to grow in your parenting skills and your own relationship with God.



Faith-filled Service:

- When nursing and/or feeding the baby, view time together as a holy gift.
- When bathing or changing the child, stay present to her in the moment.
- Be aware of growth in your own spiritual gifts (such as patience) when the child awakens you in the night.

Preschool–Kindergarten



Spiritual Practices:

- Experiment with prayer with pictures.
- Start to learn liturgical responses (e.g., “Amen,” “Thanks be to God”).
- Become aware that the baptismal waters claim him with God’s love, make the sign of the cross on her forehead.
- Come to the communion table for the elements and/or a blessing, understanding that we come because Jesus welcomes us all to the table.



Respectful Relationships:

- Develop an awareness that God loves her deeply.
- Claim themselves as created and beloved by God.
- Converse about faith as a lived practice when at home.
- Know name of her church, pastor(s), and/or teacher(s).



Guided Learning:

- Attend Bible class (e.g., Sunday school, Godly Play).
- Learn about Moses; Eve and Adam; Jonah; Jesus, born of Mary and Joseph; and Jesus’ death and resurrection. Familiarity can come through listening to stories or music, whether at home or church.
- Participate in day camps like Vacation Bible School.
- Experience church as a warm, welcoming, worship-filled community where they can wonder about God.



Faith-filled Service:

- Help at home: set the table, put away clothes, care for the family pet.
- Help at church: sing in children’s choir, usher.
- Bring canned goods to the church or a local charity.

Grades 1-5



Spiritual Practices:

- Pray at mealtimes and/or before bed.
- Give a regular offering.
- Pray the Lord's Prayer by heart.



Respectful Relationships:

- Know by name and receive support from at least three Christian adults other than parents and grandparents (e.g., pastor, teacher, neighbor).
- Understand the body as created in the image of God therefore worthy of love, claim private body parts as private.
- Start to do more on her own with supportive supervision.



Guided Learning:

- Retell the basics of core Bible stories in his own words (e.g., the creation story, Sarah and Abraham, Moses, Mary Magdalene and Jesus).
- Read Bible storybooks and Psalters related to these stories.
- Attend day or overnight church camp (e.g., family camp for two to four nights).



Faith-filled Service:

- Serve at church as an acolyte, reader, altar guild member, vocalist, or instrumentalist.
- Be responsible for household cleaning tasks (e.g., setting the table, taking out the trash).
- Perform acts of kindness towards grandparents.

Grades 6-8



Spiritual Practices:

- Curious about God and engaging more in conversational prayers.
- Say Lord's Prayer or impromptu prayer.
- Fast for age-appropriate amount of time (e.g., one meal a week with family).
- Participate regularly in Sunday offerings (e.g., use church envelopes).



Respectful Relationships:

- Receive acknowledgment from congregational/community leaders.
- Develop a mentorship relationship with a congregation member.
- Help lead VBS or Sunday School.
- Show awareness of one's own gender and form appropriate relationships with people of other genders.



Guided Learning:

- Attend church camp.
- Come up with his own favorite Bible verse.
- Know a sacred story that most closely relates to her personal story.
- Learn about available resources (e.g., prayer book, faith website).



Faith-filled Service:

- Help a neighbor by bringing a meal, mowing the lawn, or babysitting.
- Volunteer at food bank.
- Serve as a eucharistic minister (e.g., bring communion to the homebound with a parent's help).
- Serve on a youth committee, in the church nursery or for a service organization.

Grades 9-12



Spiritual Practices:

- Become comfortable leading prayers and mentioning friends and family in petitions.
- Continue to give to the church and to causes that are important to her.
- Serve in worship leadership roles (e.g., reader, communion/worship assistant).
- Participate in a “spiritual mountaintop experience,” perhaps the ELCA Youth Gathering, a service trip, or a summer camp.



Respectful Relationships:

- Be in a mentor-mentee relationship with at least one faithful, trustworthy adult.
- Mentor younger youth as camp counselor or nursery worker.
- Develop positive friendships that are encouraging and countercultural, particularly in their exclusion of gossiping and competition.
- Remain aware of changes in the body, discussing with a trusted adult the sexual aspects of dating life.



Guided Learning:

- Attend a Bible study with peers or adults.
- Dive deeper into Lutheran theology by learning more about the Reformation.
- Share his faith story (written or oral) with a group of peers or the congregation.
- Learn about other Christian denominations and religions and how they compare to the ELCA.



Faith-filled Service:

- Be involved with a congregational committee or team.
- Volunteer regularly in the community.
- Go on a domestic or international service trip.
- Lead or participate in a fundraising event for a local individual, charity, or cause.

Young Adults



Spiritual Practices:

- Pray for the needs of the world.
- Share sacred traditions, particularly around the holidays.
- Lead worship.
- Give to the church as well as to charities that are clear about their mission.



Respectful Relationships:

- Form intimate relationships shaped by faith, seeing the body as a gift from God and treating other people's bodies with respect.
- Maintain transparency and authenticity with at least one peer/adult in her life (e.g., former youth leader/pastor).
- Appreciate and respect other faith and religious traditions.
- Support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people and relationships.



Guided Learning:

- Recognize the historical context of the Bible as the inspired word of God.
- Read books related to faith.
- Ask questions and wrestle with his faith/life in an open/nonjudgmental setting.
- Develop a personalized faith narrative drawn from tradition and reflection that strengthens her identity and quality of life.



Faith-filled Service:

- Engage in advocacy for justice and societal transformation (e.g., speak out on social media, march for a cause).
- Care for creation (e.g., recycling, shopping local).
- Utilize faith embodied in leadership gifts in or outside of church.
- Serve in global mission, in campus ministry, or as a camp counselor.

Middle-Senior Adult



Spiritual Practices:

- Pray regularly with friends/spouse/children/grandchildren.
- Budget responsibly so that she can both save and share with the church and other charities (even sharing sacrificially).
- Study the Bible outside of church, using commentaries/devotionals.
- Worship with the church community most weeks and invite friends along.



Respectful Relationships:

- Encourage faith-filled wondering in others, journey alongside godchildren/children/grandchildren/children of the congregation.
- Model Christ's welcome, respecting those who are "different" in race, ethnicity, gender, age, economic status, sexual orientation, and/or religion.
- Support the person he/she is in a dating or committed relationship with, sharing in faith conversations and prayers for one another.
- Seek to make all groups inclusive and welcoming of newcomers.



Guided Learning:

- Become comfortable with learning and discussing the devotional, literary, historical, and theological dimensions of a biblical passage.
- Seek out movies, videos, and books with religious themes and reflect on how they relate to his own belief system.
- Model openness to learning, especially during times of transition, by hearing all sides and supporting the church's mission.
- Show familiarity with the lectionary, Creation, Exodus, the prophets, Psalms, Jesus' life, the early church, the Reformation, and salvation as a gift from God.



Faith-filled Service:

- Use talents and gifts to help others (e.g., teach English as a second language).
- Volunteer in the community (e.g., PTA, scouts, local government).
- Serve consistently in some role(s) in the congregation, intentionally welcome and train others to participate in the ministry.
- Pass on faith stories, perhaps in one-to-one interactions (e.g., as a parent,

Sources

1. Artwork commissioned from A Sanctified Art artist Lauren Wright Pittman, 2017.
 2. White Paper “A Framework for Faith Formation in the ELCA Fall 2015” the outcome of two Faith Formation Summits (2011 & 2014), representing 30 organizations in the ELCA. <https://faithformationsummit.wordpress.com/chicago-2016>
 3. Kehrwald, Leif, et al. *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Connecticut: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016. 85. Print.
 4. Keep in mind the context of your specific setting for best use of these broad ranging practices.
 5. “Search Institute’s Effective Christian Education study found that faith conversations, rituals and service to others in the home were more strongly associated with adolescents’ faith maturity than was participation in effective Christian education programs.” Kehrwald, Leif, et al. *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Connecticut: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016. 12. Print.
 6. Kehrwald, Leif, et al. *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Connecticut: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016. 14. Print.
 7. Acts 16 as retold by Pastor Janelle Rozek Hooper.
 8. “Faith formation and practice: Support and provide resources for faith formation and practice with children and across the life span – within households, workplaces and communities – and share learnings across this church.” Goal 2 of Priority 2 of the “Called Forth Together in Christ” ELCA Strategic Directions for 2025 published December 2016.
 9. “Lifelong faith formation in the ELCA is guided by our baptismal covenant and the Holy Spirit’s ongoing guidance as we live among God’s faithful people, hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers. 2006. 227. Print.
 10. Kehrwald, Leif, et al. *Families at the Center of Faith Formation*. Connecticut: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016. 110. Print.
- Thank you to Debbie Streicher, Carolyn White, Milestone Ministries & Dr. Dawn Rundman, Sparkhouse Publishers for their contributions. Additional source recognition goes to: “Learning Goals for Children –Building Faith,” Sharon Ely Pearson. May 6, 2012. www.buildfaith.org/learning-goals-for-children. The Presbyterian Church USA Educator Certification Handbook, 2016. <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/educator-certification-handbook>. “The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation.” Resolution A082. www.episcopalchurch.org. “What Every Child Should Experience: A Guide for Leaders and Teachers in United Methodist Congregations,” Nashville: www.UMCdiscipleship.org.

